



**Testimony presented to the New York Education Reform Commission
Presented by Carol Vallone, CEO Educate Online
Date: September 24, 2012**

Included in the testimony:

- The K-20 Issue of College and Career Readiness
- Introduction to Educate Online
- The New York Experience
- Removing Road Blocks
- The Problems Educate Online Addresses and Solves in K-20 Schools
- Educate Online's Unique Approach
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The K-20 Issue of College and Career Readiness

There are benchmarks in a student's education that if not successfully achieved, have a negative impact on college and career readiness. Currently, there is great inefficiency around the use of funds devoted to the career and college readiness issue. Public funds are all too often being used on solutions that produce poor outcomes and are not effective in preparing students for college or the workforce. This has a negative impact on local and global economies. Locally, lower income tax revenues are generated at the state and federal levels, and globally, the lack of preparedness hinders our ability to remain competitive.

These benchmarks start as early as kindergarten and continue through different critical points during a child's middle and secondary education. Although the problem starts at the earliest point in a child's education, missing any of these educational milestones affects their ability to prepare adequately for college studies or professional, skilled employment.

The following statistics illustrate the consequences throughout the K-20 spectrum:

- 46% of children in the United States enter kindergarten unprepared. Research shows that children who start behind typically stay behind. Providing young children with opportunities to develop early literacy skills is important to their success in school, their success in learning to read, and their success in life. ⁱ
- More than two-thirds of 4th graders (and an even higher number of at-risk students) read so poorly they cannot complete their schoolwork successfully. Research evidence confirms the strong connection between early skill development and later reading success. ⁱⁱ
- 66% of students across the U.S. tested below proficient in 8th grade math achievement levels. In NY, this number is 70%. ⁱⁱⁱ What is concerning is young people who transition to adulthood with limited mathematics skills are likely to find it difficult to function in society. Basic arithmetic skills are required for everyday computations, and sometimes for job applications. Additionally, competence in mathematics skills is related to higher levels of employability. ^{iv}
- Nearly 60% of first-year college students discover that, despite being fully eligible to attend college, they are not ready for postsecondary studies and must take non-credit bearing courses in math and English. The result is an increased in the time to graduate and an increased financial burden to students. It lowers completion rates, pass and graduation rates, and has a negative impact on career readiness and competitiveness. ^v

- Only 46% of students in the U.S. complete college once they start it. That puts the United States behind Japan (89 percent), and former Soviet-bloc states such as Slovakia (63 percent) and Poland (61 percent).^{vi} And the U.S. has the highest college drop-out rate in the industrialized world.^{vii}

Introduction to Educate Online

Over our 8 year history, Educate Online has focused on building gateway skills for Career and College Readiness through personalized, live online instruction in reading, math and writing for K-20 students. Nationally, students in Educate Online programs demonstrate gains of .6 to 2.2 grade levels in just 24 one-hour, live, one-on-one online sessions. Students have also shown tremendous gains in the mastery of critical skills and have reduced skill gaps that previously hindered their academic success. The overall impact is improved college readiness, improved pass rates, improved retention rates, reduced drop-out rates, improved graduation rates, more efficient and effective use of taxpayer dollars funding education, and ultimately, more skilled talent entering the workforce generating income tax dollars.

Educate Online partners with K-12 schools, districts, and post-secondary institutions to build gateway skills for their students.

The New York Experience

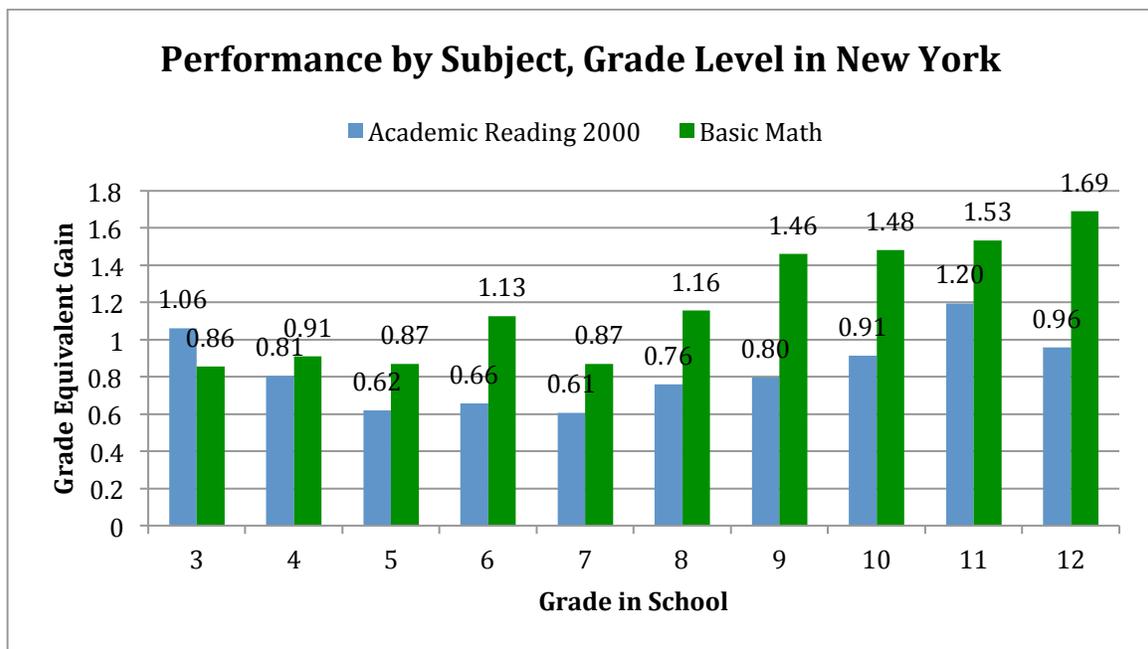
Since 2010, Educate Online has served almost 14,000 students in New York. We have met the needs of a highly diverse student population with more than 40% of the students being Hispanic or Latino, about 30% African American, about 20% Asian and about 10% Caucasian students. Educate Online has also supported ELL students and those with Special Needs.

Students who have participated in Educate Online programs have come from two dozen different districts in New York State, including New York City, Albany, Attica,

Brewster, Canastota, East Ramapo, Ellenville, Elmira, Greene, Hempstead, Hornell City, Horseheads, Jamestown, Lansingburgh, Middletown, Minisink, Mount Vernon, Newburgh, Onteora, Penn Yan, Rome, Salamanca, Schenectady, Wellsville, and Yorkshire.

Educate Online provides a new efficient and effective model of instruction. In New York, students gained an average .86 grade levels in reading and 1.33 grade levels in math, for an overall average of 1.14 grade levels. These gains were made in less than 24 hours of online instruction. Traditional instruction typically yields a gain of one grade level; however it is from approximately 900 hours of face-to-face instruction as compared to the 24 hours of live, one-on-one online instruction from Educate Online.

The following chart illustrates the significant academic gains made in reading and math at all grade levels in New York. For example, students in the 11th grade gained 1.2 grade level equivalencies in reading and 1.53 grade level equivalencies in math.



Removing Road Blocks

Educate Online has a proven, successful model that can be used to serve students throughout New York's urban and rural areas. In order to help make it easier to expand these services to serve a greater number of students, we would recommend the following changes:

- Reallocate funding from less effective programs. Currently there is an inefficient use of taxpayer dollars. Funds are being used for non-measurable or non-effective programs. Moving funding so it can be used to bring Educate Online to a broader range of students is a more effective use of taxpayer dollars. Reallocating funds for this use will also benefit a wider range of students (K-20), and serving this broader group will benefit not just the students themselves, but the local and state economies.
- Authorize collaboration with the 37 BOCES to make Educate Online programs available to a greater number of schools and districts, especially those serving rural populations. Not only will this greatly simplify the administration of Educate Online programs, (rather than each school dedicating a resource to administer the program, it can be administered through one representative at a BOCE) it allows the solution to scale rapidly.
- Remove the PETS fingerprinting requirement for online instructors. Educate Online has a rigorous process to recruit our U.S.-based instructors. The process includes a thorough criminal background check and instructors must show proof of current certification and credentials. Because of the timeframe involved for PETS fingerprinting, it severely hinders our ability to staff and serve the needs of the students in New York. On average, our experience has been it takes six months to have fingerprints clear, and on occasion it has taken up to 18 months.
- Change the rules around parent choice programs. Parent choice programs often put the students in the most need at a disadvantage. For programs that are on a first-come, first-serve basis, it is difficult to get an uninvolved parent

to take action, and the child most in need of the service misses out. We recommend allowing school administrators to have a greater influence in these programs giving all students an equal opportunity to participate.

The Problems Educate Online Addresses and Solves in K-20 Schools

Educate Online's programs are customizable, scalable, and produce documented results. Educate Online makes dashboard reports available to the K-20 institutions we work with. The important data and analytics provided in these reports gives schools, colleges and universities the ability to monitor student progression and gives visibility into the actual competency levels of students. All of this helps to inform strategic decisions around critical institutional goals and objectives.

Together Educate Online partners with K-20 institutions to provide effective solutions to many of the critical issues they are facing including:

In K-12:

- **Early Literacy**
 - **Problem:** There is a correlation between reading ability and overall student success. Students who cannot read by third grade have little or no access to the entire curriculum.
 - **Solution:** Students receive individualized online instruction focused on their specific proficiency gaps in reading. By teaching students how to read, Educate Online provides the gateway to the rest of the curriculum. The live, one-on-one online instruction can take place outside of the classroom, including in the student's home or at a community center.
 - **Benefit:** Educate Online has great success increasing reading proficiency. Because instruction takes place outside of the classroom, the student does not miss other critical class time. Additionally, when a student is participating in these sessions from home, it provides parents visibility into the child's reading program and is an easy way

to develop the skills in students that are at risk for not reading at the appropriate grade level.

- **College and Career Readiness**

- **Problem:** A large percentage of students are not developing the skills needed for college and career readiness during their traditional face-to-face K-12 education.
- **Solution:** Educate Online partners with K-12 schools to help students develop critical math, reading, and writing skills. Students meet for live, one-on-one online sessions with an Educate Online instructor. The lessons are tailored to the individual, resulting in a personalized experience for each student. The instructor focuses on instruction designed to build mastery in the student's areas of weakness.
- **Benefit:** More students graduate from their secondary studies college and career ready. They now will have the necessary academic skills for college level courses, and can enroll in credit-bearing courses without having to first taking a remedial or developmental course. Not only will students be better prepared for success at colleges and universities they will be better prepared for the workforce.

- **Summer Bridge**

- **Problem:** Significant learning loss takes place in the summer and keeping schools open during the summer in order to provide a program can be very costly.
- **Solution:** Educate Online delivers rigorous live, online summer programs in reading, math and writing to prevent learning loss and advance student skills levels.
- **Benefit:** The program is delivered at a greatly reduced cost to the school, and students return in the Fall having limited their learning loss. Since the learners can access the Educate Online programs from computers at home or at a community center, schools do not have to remain open during the summer.

- **Response-to-Intervention (RTI)**

- **Problem:** Schools that serve a small population of students that require an RTI program find doing so can be costly. Further, schools in rural areas find it is not always easy to recruit qualified instructors for an RTI program. In both cases, staffing this type of program can be difficult and expensive, especially when considering the number of students needing to be served.
- **Solution:** Educate Online is a customized solution that addresses the individual needs of students in RTI programs and provides the specialized intervention, monitoring, and reporting required in these types of programs.
- **Benefit:** Schools that need to serve a very small population are able to do so more cost-effectively, and those located in rural areas that find it difficult to staff locally can still provide RTI without having to compromise on the quality of the educational experience to the students.
- **After School Extended Day Programs**
 - **Problem:** Research shows a shorter school day widens the achievement gap and has a negative impact on skill development. It can also be costly to run an after school program.
 - **Solution:** Educate Online works with schools to deliver customized programs that provide personalized learning experiences for each student. Students use their school's computer resources to participate in the live, one-on-one online session and they receive individualized attention from the Educate Online instructor.
 - **Benefit:** The extended school day helps reduce the achievement gap and strengthens critical skills. There is also evidence that the overall school learning climate is improved, attendance rates are boosted, and disciplinary incidents are reduced.^{viii} Educate Online makes it easy for schools to quickly provide this type of program.
- **Credit Recovery**

- **Problem:** Students who are missing credits or are behind in credits are prevented from graduating on time or even at all. These students are often frustrated learners, who need higher levels of support.
- **Solution:** Educate Online engages with each student individually and creates a learning plan that addresses their specific skills gaps in the courses where they need credit.
- **Benefit:** The personalized attention these students get through Educate Online programs helps engage them and leads to greater student achievement in this at-risk population. Because the programs are individualized, students only participate in the number of sessions they need, enabling students to decrease the time remaining to graduate. This particular program helps schools increase graduation rates and reduce drop out rates.

In Post-secondary:

- **Student Pipeline Preparedness**
 - **Problem:** Large numbers of students are entering post-secondary institutions not college-ready and need to take a non-credit remedial/developmental courses, delaying the time to complete their degree program.
 - **Solution:** Educate Online helps colleges work with their feeder high schools to assess students early during their secondary education and develop the reading, math and writing skills needed for college readiness. Students engage with an Educate Online instructor for live, one-on-one, online instruction. Students build mastery in the skill gaps identified during the assessment.
 - **Benefit:** More students enter their post-secondary studies college-ready and are not delayed in getting into credit-bearing programs. Educate Online helps to increase post-secondary persistence rates, pass rates, retention rates, and graduation rates.
- **Recruiting cycle**

- **Problem:** Colleges and universities need to boost enrollments and need a way to increase the number of students who enroll after receiving notice of acceptance, particularly for diverse populations.
- **Solution:** Educate Online works with schools to create programs to target desired student populations that have been accepted but not yet enrolled. The institutions provide unique incentives to the students through Educate Online’s live, online reading, math and writing programs that help ensure college readiness for freshmen gateway courses.
- **Benefit:** The personalized nature of this program helps the school stand out from other choices the student may have and can boost enrollment of a diverse population helping improve the institution’s equity scorecard.
- **Provisional acceptance**
 - **Problem:** Colleges and universities are accepting large percentages of students not academically prepared for post-secondary studies. This drives up drop out rates, increases cost of remediation and lowers retention and graduation rates.
 - **Solution:** Educate Online assesses students during the admission process to determine if students have the skills needed for academic success. If they do not assess as college ready, the students are provisionally accepted and directed to participate in an Educate Online reading, math and/or writing program that is designed to build mastery. At program completion, the students take a post-assessment; if they have successfully demonstrated proficiency levels, the school will extend acceptance to the students.
 - **Benefit:** Institutions are able to enroll a more qualified student population and since more students begin their studies college-ready, it greatly increases their likelihood of completing their degree program. Persistence rates, pass rates, and retention rates are all

improved and colleges and universities also see a positive impact on rankings, compliance and financial objectives.

- **Extended Orientation**

- **Problem:** Incoming freshmen do not feel an immediate connection to their new college or university. Feeling disconnected contributes to drop-out rates and lowers persistence rates.
- **Solution:** Educate Online’s reading, math, and/or writing programs can be a critical component of the school’s orientation program. By providing personalized learning and engaging the student immediately a positive experience is created from the start.
- **Benefit:** Early and frequent engagement increases the likelihood of retention. Educate Online programs boost the skills and confidence of students and sets them on a path to success. Early engagement increases persistence, pass and retention rates, and reduces the first-year drop out rates.

- **Multiple Repeaters**

- **Problem:** Students requiring developmental and remedial courses are often lagging so far behind that they are not able to pass these courses on the first attempt. The longer it takes to get into a credit-bearing program, the more expensive the cost of education is to the student, and the less likely the student is to actually complete their degree program. These courses do not typically address the specific needs of the individual student and the learner loses interest because the instruction is not tailored or relevant to them.
- **Solution:** The Educate Online reading, math and writing programs are embedded into an existing remedial program or are provided as a pre-course to the developmental course. In the embedded program, a portion of the course hours are swapped for Educate Online hours. Regardless of how the program is offered, students take an assessment that identifies skill gaps. This information is used to create a personalized learning experience for them. The Educate

Online instructor meets in real-time with the student to work with them in one-on-one online sessions. If a student is demonstrating mastery of a concept sooner than anticipated, the instructor can adapt the lesson to move through the material at a quicker pace.

- **Benefit:** Students are able to get into credit-bearing courses sooner, helping to lower their overall cost of education. The colleges and universities see an increase in persistence rates, pass rates, retention rates as well as an increase in graduation rates.

- **Initial Course Success**

- **Problem:** Large percentages of students are arriving for post-secondary studies not prepared for college-level courses. If students are not successful in the initial courses, it delays time to completion.
- **Solution:** Educate Online's reading, math and/or writing programs are embedded into the initial course. Students enter the course with skills gaps having been identified in an assessment they take prior to the start of the course. The Educate Online instructor can immediately begin working one-on-one with the student in the online environment to address the skills gaps and build proficiencies in critical areas. The result is that the student is academically prepared, not just for the initial course, but also subsequent courses.
- **Benefit:** Increasing the number of students successful in their first course positively impacts persistence, pass, and retention rates. As students find success in the first course, they also are more likely to continue on to complete the requirements of their entire degree or certificate program.

- **First Year Retention**

- **Problem:** The highest drop out rates in post-secondary studies occur during the first year, and this is costly to institutions and demoralizing to students. There is a loss of tuition revenues and unfilled capacity at the college or university and it reduces the likelihood that the student will re-engage and develop the necessary skills to be productive and

reach their potential. The loss of students also negatively impacts school rankings, competitiveness, funding, and other critical measures.

- **Solution:** Students who struggle academically during their first semester are enrolled in an Educate Online program. The program focuses on their individual needs and can take place concurrently with their studies or during a school break. This instruction does not delay the student's progress in getting through their course load.
- **Benefit:** Participation in these sessions builds the skills the student is lacking, puts them on the path to college completion, and builds the institution's persistence, pass, retention rates, and graduation rates.

Educate Online's Unique Approach

Educate Online delivers critical gateway skills in K-20 learners for college and career readiness. Educate Online's math, reading and writing programs include competency-based assessments that provide ongoing visibility into students' grade equivalency levels and skills gaps. Educate Online delivers personalized instruction designed to build mastery and proficiency levels through one-on-one, live online sessions that are engaging and adaptive. Students have improved academic outcomes and institutions have improved retention rates, pass rates and graduation rates.

For students the process is as follows:

- The student takes a nationally normed assessment to determine skill gaps.
- A personalized learning plan is created and includes a recommendation for the number of Educate Online sessions the student should participate in. This is determined by the number of skills the student needs to master as identified by the assessment results.
- The student is matched with an instructor from within Educate Online's large network of U.S.-based, certified instructors. Matches are determined by a

variety of factors, including learner level, student's language abilities, and other specialized needs.

- The Educate Online instructor engages with the student in one hour, live one-on-one sessions with customized instruction designed to optimize the student's learning experience.
- The Education Team works with students to motivate and build student confidence throughout the program.
- Both students and schools are provided with customized dashboards to monitor and track ongoing student progress. By providing schools with data and analytics about student outcomes, the information can be used to inform strategic decisions around curriculum, key institutional metrics, and other important goals and objectives.

Educate Online's Documented Results

Educate Online programs produce documented results in K-20 learners. The following is a summary of student gains our customers have experienced.

- **Academic Gains in K-12**
 - Nationally
 - Students gain an average of 1.44 grade levels in math and 1.04 grade levels in reading when engaging in 24 one hour, live, one-on-one online sessions.
 - Gains in New York
 - Students gained an average of 1.33 grade levels in math and .86 grade levels in reading when engaging in an average of 24 one hour, live, one-on-one, online sessions.
 - Students in grades 9-12 achieved 1.51 grade levels of growth engaging in an average of 24 one hour, live, one-on-one online sessions.
 - 12th grade students completing the Educate Online program achieved an average of 1.69 grade equivalents in math.

- **Examples of Academic Gains in Higher Education**
 - A college that is part of PASSHE (PA State System of Higher ED)
 - Incoming students are not adequately prepared for post-secondary studies; the college partners with Educate Online to improve college readiness for incoming students.
 - A 5-week Educate Online summer bridge program focusing on math and reading is implemented for incoming freshmen.
 - On average students achieved a 1.03 grade equivalency gain in reading in 10 hours of live, one-on-one online instruction.
 - On average students achieved a 2.0 grade equivalency gain in math in 15 hours of live, one-on-one instruction.
 - A large mid-west university
 - The school needs to address low pass and retention rates.
 - They partner with Educate Online to assess every incoming student. The assessment results are used to implement customized instruction that is embedded in an Initial Course Success program.
 - Educate Online provides detailed data and analytics used to inform strategic decisions and continual improvement to college programs and processes.
 - Over 3,000 students have participated to date.
 - Pass rates have increased from 46% to 79% for students participating in 10-19 Educate Online sessions.
 - Student retention rates have increased from 48.91% to 72.59%.

Educate Online’s math, reading, and writing programs address the needs of learners through critical stages of the K-20 continuum. Students participating in these customized online programs are able to develop a strong foundation for academic success at all stages of their education. Institutions find great value in bringing Educate Online programs to their students. They are able to improve student

services and impact student outcomes. At every grade level, schools are finding students are demonstrating significant improvements in levels of mastery and are building the critical gateway skills needed for college and career readiness. This is leading to improved school rankings and assessments, higher pass rates, higher persistence rates, higher retention rates, and higher graduation rates. When students are able to build the proficiencies needed for college and career success, they can reach their full potential. And when the population is qualified for and is able to secure higher paying knowledge-based jobs, they are also able to contribute more to local, state income taxes helping to build a stronger economy.

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ⁱ <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>

ⁱⁱ http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/EL_policy09.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/acrossstates/Rankings.aspx?order=a&loct=2&dtm=11575&by=v&tf=867&ind=5119&ch=a&sortid=13725>

^{iv} <http://www.childtrendsatabank.org/?q=node/256>

^v http://www.highereducation.org/reports/college_readiness/gap.shtml

^{vi} <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/27/us-attn-andrea-education-dropouts-idUSBRE82Q0Y120120327>

^{vii} <http://chronicle.com/article/Tuning-In-to-Dropping-Out/130967/>

^{viii} <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/24556/>

Testimony Prepared for the New York Education Reform Commission

Submitted by:
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Educate Online Addresses Increasing Pressure for New K20 Developmental Solutions



2/3 of students are below proficiency levels in Math and Reading in the 4th grade*



2/3 of students ***are still*** below proficiency levels in Math and Reading in the 8th grade*



60% of college freshmen are not college-ready**



Only 46% of those who enter college actually graduate***

Sources:

* The Nation's Report Card, 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report

** Beyond the Rhetoric: Improving College Readiness Through Coherent State Policy, 2010 The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

*** David Conley, 2008 College Knowledge

Educate Online Builds Gateway Skills for College and Career Readiness for K20 Students

Through Competency-based Reading, Math, and Writing Programs



Elementary School

- Early literacy
- Summer bridge
- In-school response-to-intervention (RTI)



Middle School

- Summer bridge
- After school extended day programs
- RTI



Secondary School

- Dropout prevention
- Summer bridge
- After school extended day programs
- RTI
- Credit recovery
- College and career readiness

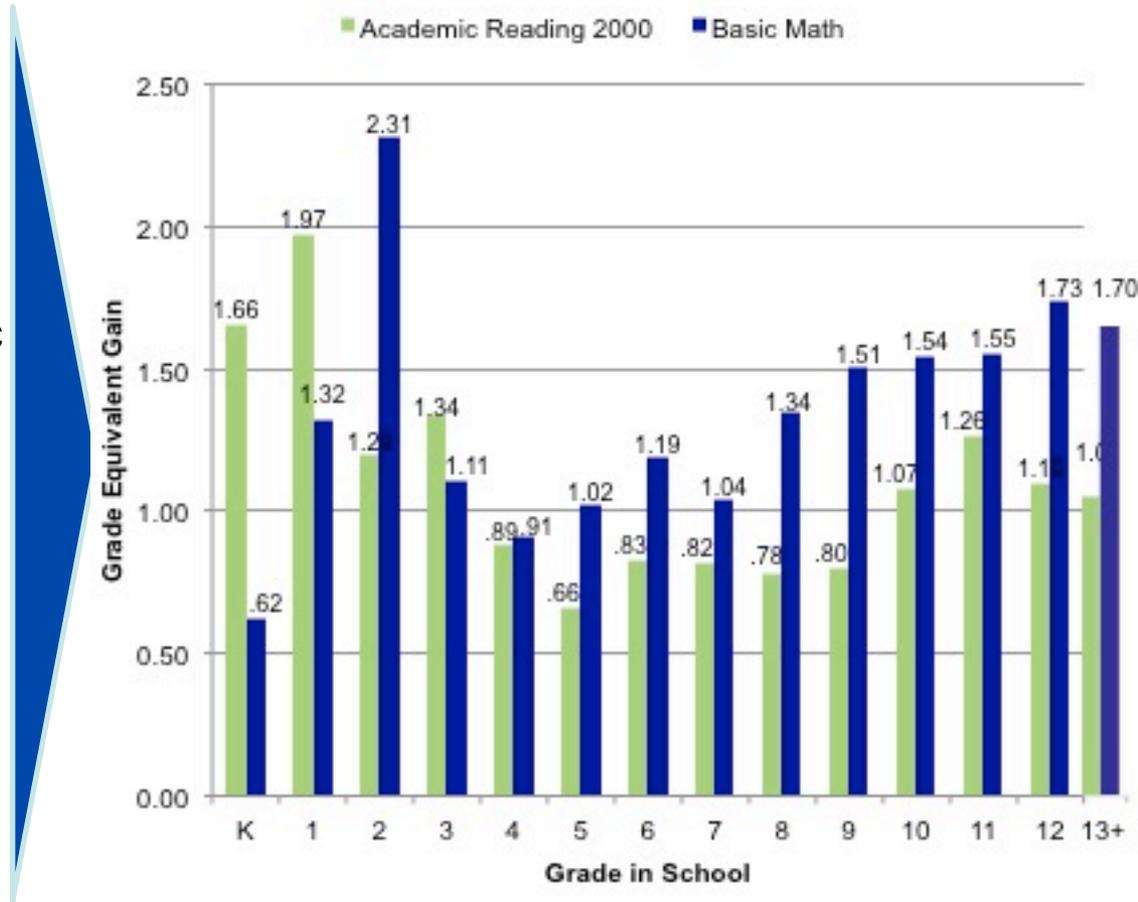


Post-Secondary School

- Student pipeline preparedness
- Recruiting cycle
- Provisional acceptance
- Summer bridge
- Extended orientation
- Initial course success
- First year retention

Educate Online Grade Level Improvements (for K-20 students served nationally)

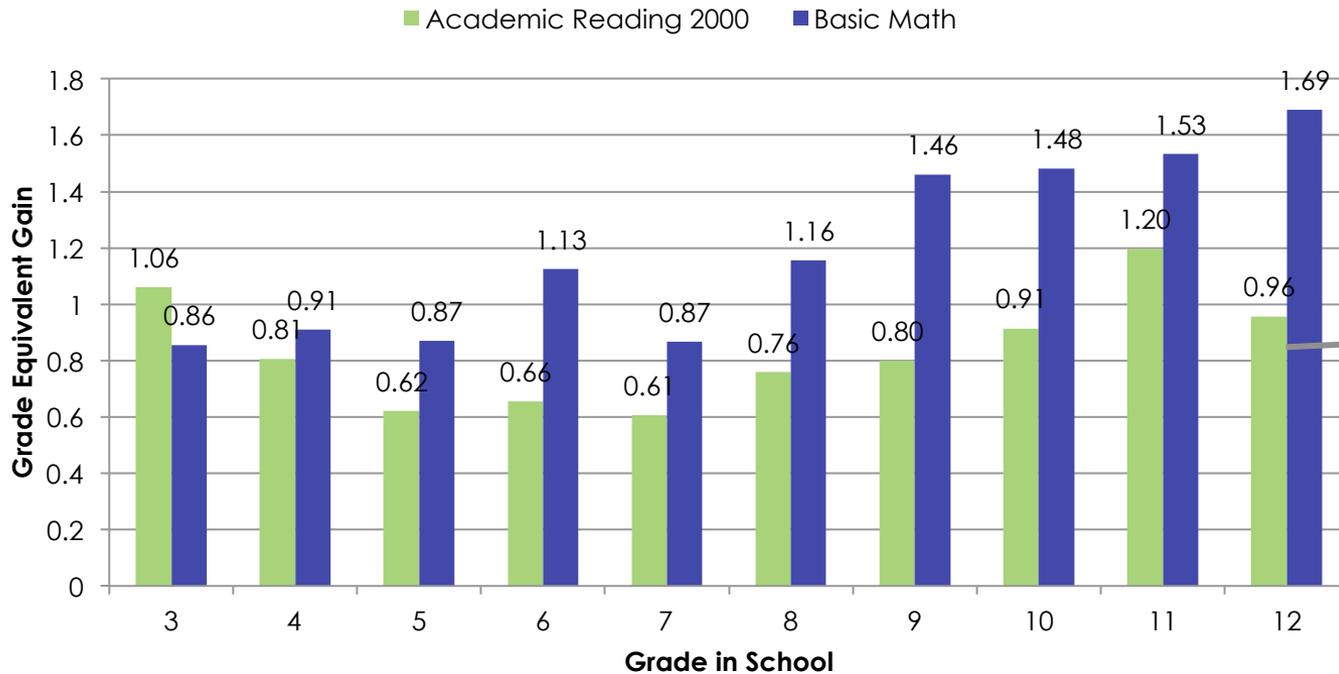
- Competency-based assessments
- Customized and personalized learning models
- Live, online, one-on-one academic instruction with multi-lingual, US-based instructors
- Live, online, one-on-one motivational and study skills coaching
- Customized data and analytics



Educate Online's unique service produces documented academic outcomes

New York Performance Highlights: Educate Online Grade Level Improvements

Performance by Subject, grade level

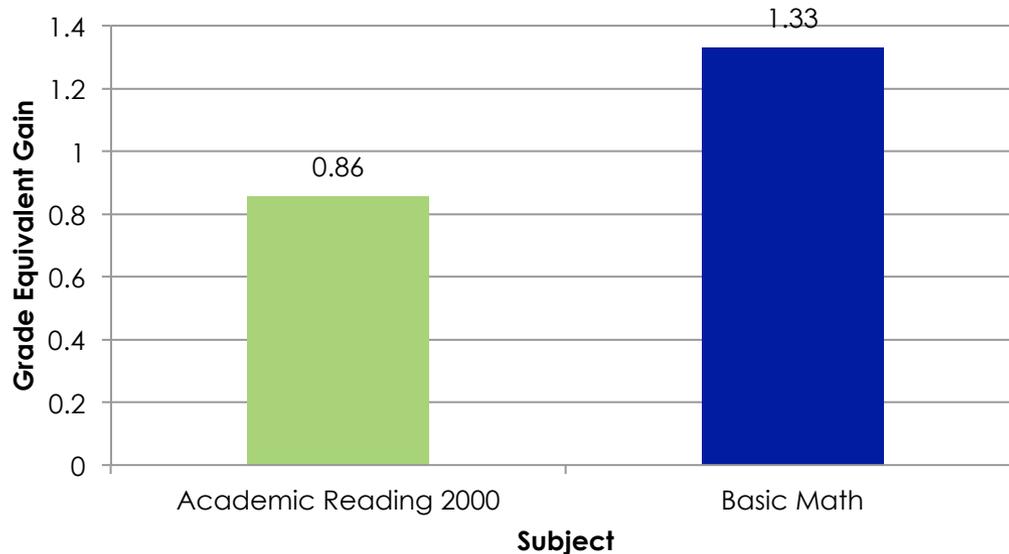


For example, 12th graders in New York gained 1.69 grade level equivalents in Math and .96 grade level equivalents in Reading having participated in an average of 24, one-on-one, live, online sessions.

New York Performance Highlights: Grade Gain by Subject Area

Students gained on average 0.86 grade levels in reading and 1.33 grade levels in math, or an average of 1.14 grade levels, when participating in an average of 24 one hour, live one-on-one online sessions.

Grade Gain by Subject



Higher Ed Customer Success Story: Summer Bridge Program

- Profile:
 - A small college part of the PASSHE (PA State System of Higher ED.)
 - Rural location
 - 96% of the student population from in-State
- Challenge:
 - Incoming students are not college-ready
- Solution:
 - Educate Online Summer Bridge Program
 - Students participated in 5 weeks of Educate Online Math and Reading online instruction from the school's computer lab

The Results: Significant Student Gains in a Short Time

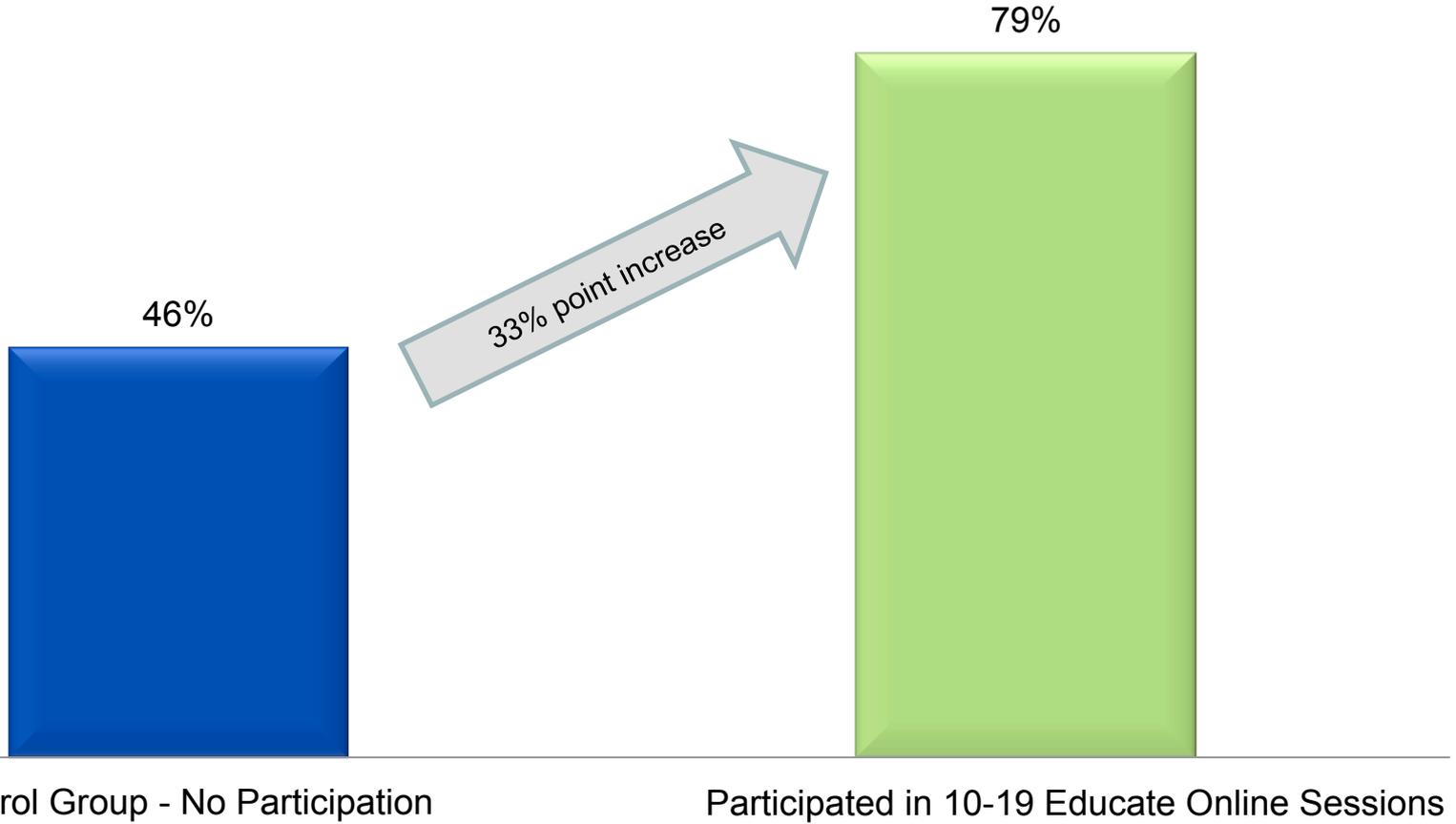
- Math
 - On average students achieved a 2.0 grade equivalency gain when engaging with an Educate Online instructor in 15 hours of live, one-on-one, online instruction

- Reading
 - On average students achieved a 1.03 grade equivalency gain when engaging with an Educate Online instructor in 10 hours of live, one-on-one, online instruction

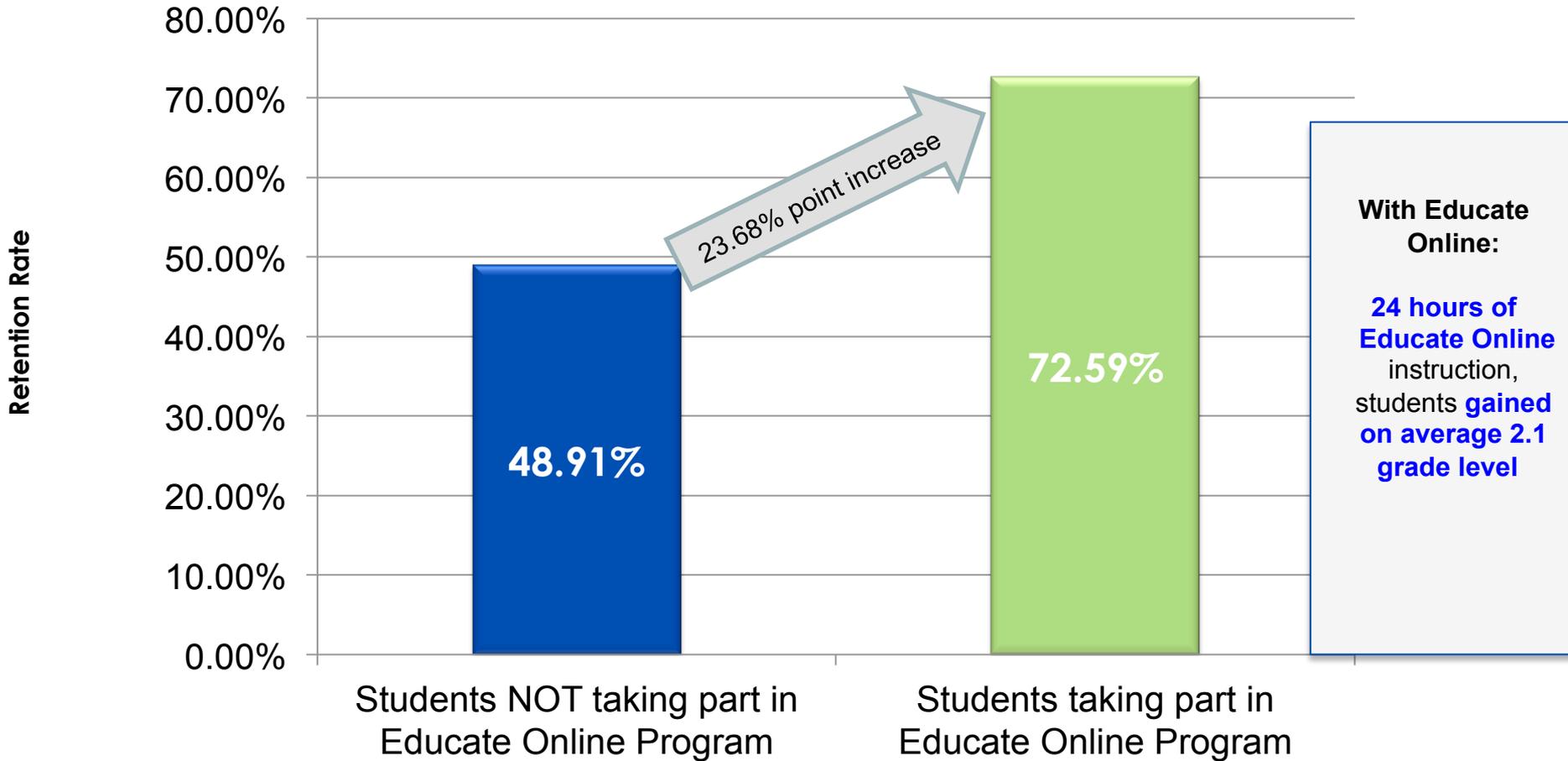
Higher Ed Customer Success Story: Initial Course Success Program

- Profile:
 - A large mid-west school accredited by The Higher Learning Commission and a member of the North Central Association.
 - The school is a completely open access university.
 - The university focuses on adult learners and non-traditional students. The average age of the student is 24.
- Challenge:
 - Low pass rates and retention rates
- Solution:
 - Assess all incoming students
 - Customized and personalized Educate Online instruction embedded in an Intro Course

The Results: Improvements in Pass Rates



The Results: Increased Student Retention Rates



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